Catherine Hughes Assistive Technology

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After visiting many of the different websites dealing with assistive technology and watching videos of students using this technology, I discovered that although not seen as often in mainstream classrooms, assistive technology has been progressing at the same rate as mainstream technology. One of the reasons this is a relatively unknown fact to many educators, not specifically in the SPED fields, is because often mainstream schools are not integrating these types of assistive technology in their curriculum because they have no need for them. There are not as many students with disabilities in the mainstream school system (particularly in the case of students with more severe disabilities such as cerebral palsy), so often students with a less severe disability are able to function with less advanced technology. Students with more severe disabilities often go to schools specializing in and dedicated to special needs education. However, as schooling becomes more inclusive there will become a greater need to include this assistive technology into the curriculum and specific educational planning of individual students.

A particular site, which had access to other links that included, suggested lesson planning and implementation tools which I found particularly useful was Kathy Schrock’s Guide for Educators at:

<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/edtools.html> . This site allowed users to view and connect to various sites that included information and accessibility to: Internet integration tools, project integration, paraeducational resources, speech and language resources, and an American Sign Language browser. I had no idea exactly how much technology was out there. I was impressed to see when browsing through the items and was shocked to see results displaying 1 of 6,000 items available for communication. I knew that assistive technology was out there but I was unaware of how much and how far it has come. I have taken a SPED course in the past and visited Ridge Ruxton before. When I was there, I observed students with severe cerebral palsy- they did not have more advanced computer technology, but rather worked with the flash cards, voice boxes, and tech such as the BIGmack communicator to use pre-recorded messages to respond to questions. I realized even then, so early in my educational journey, how important communication is and giving all students the proper tools and platform to communicate properly.

After watching the video on Ellen I actually saw what assistive technology can

do for students in need. It gives the promise of freedom. Ellen was able, using her assistive chair, to now be able to move around on her own free to go to lesson when she wants without relying on someone to get her there. I also found this to be proof of how much people with disabilities such as cerebral palsy can do own their own. Yes, Ellen was in a chair for her whole life; yes, she has a severe case of the disease. Nevertheless she is able to communicate, learn, and now get around own her own. This technology must give her such pride in her potential and abilities as a student. I also located a video I found really informative and beneficial especially for educators who are looking to ways to help their students become fully included into a mainstream classroom. This video describes ways that Washington College has developed programs that help students get ready for their college educational environment. It also explains how getting students ready to use assistive technology must start at an early age so they can master and use it throughout their educational experience:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZ5CkpgVQJ4&feature=endscreen&NR=1>

This site explains how technology can be individualized to each of the students. It also shows how the potential and promise technology can give students an individualized voice an ability to communicate not only in the school but also in the home and social areas of life. This technology will continue to expand the opportunities for students with the disabilities to participate in.

I went to school with a student who was hearing impaired in elementary school. He wore a hearing aid to class as his means of assistive technology. Looking back now as an educational intern I can see all of the flaws the educational system then had. I went to a private religious grade school in the late 80’s early 90’s when I am sure educational assistive technology was in its infancy. I know that not only was this student at a disadvantage so was his teachers and peers at understanding and accommodating for his disability. This student never sat in front of the classroom he more often than not sat in the back, he was always getting yelled at for not paying attention, and he also was never given more visual guidance be it in worksheets, directions, or step by step instruction. He never worked with a paraeducational professional or in partners to make sure he understood what was going on.

Now as I think back at this I wonder what he got out of his education. How could the school, teacher, and/or his parents better have served his educational needs? How can I as an educator make sure I do not make any of the same mistakes that I saw happen to him?

After finishing this assignment I will carry on with me as I prepare to become an educator the importance of seeing each student as an individual. This goes for disabled and non-disabled students alike. While it is a challenge to try and individualize and tailor make your lessons to accommodate the needs of specific individual students it MUST be done. No one said teaching is easy and you know what, such an unbelievably important profession must be entered into with dedication and passion. Educators need to think about each student and how they have to meet their needs. Do I think this happens every day? No. Do I think I will make mistakes? Yes. But I do know that I will try and I truly believe with the proper tools, planning, and attitude teachers can make a significant difference in a child’s life and education so it is our duty to make sure we do the best we can.